

A stylized map of the African continent is centered on the page. The continent is colored in a light tan or beige hue, while the surrounding landmasses are shown in a light grey. The background is a solid dark blue. In the upper right corner, there is a faint, circular watermark of the SAIIA logo, which includes a map of Africa and the acronym 'SAIIA'.

# **Influencing APRM**

## **A Checklist for Civil Society**



**The South African Institute of International Affairs**

**Governance and APRM Programme**

**Influencing APRM  
A Checklist for Civil Society**

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**THE SOUTH AFRICAN INSTITUTE OF INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS**

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## **Introduction**

The African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) – Africa’s premier governance self-monitoring system – represents a valuable opportunity for civil society to get key problems and solutions onto the national agenda. It can be a useful advocacy tool to usher in a more inclusive national conversation on policy and to ensure implementation of government promises. However, APRM is also complex and demanding. It can strain the resources, time, funding, and ingenuity of all its participants, particularly civil society groups without the funds and staff available to government.

In deciding how to engage with APRM, civil society should carefully weigh the political implications. Peer review hopes to inspire a more open, collaborative national conversation on governance. But APRM touches on very sensitive subjects. Many governments fear the consequences of an unrestrained APRM debate and thus have significant incentives to want to control the process by appointing allies to the various peer review institutions.

Having a realistic sense of the political dimension can be crucial for civil society. It would be desirable, from a civil society point of view, if every country were to follow the Ghana model and turn the process over to an exclusively civil society governing council. But faced with deviations to the rules by subsequent countries, the APR Secretariat and Panel of Eminent Persons made clear they were unwilling to censure or attempt to change the intended course of a determined government.

“Let us look at the APRM as contested terrain. Let’s not be very romantic about it,” argued Peter Anyang’ N’yongo at a UNECA-SAIIA training workshop for national focal points.<sup>1</sup> The former Kenyan APRM Focal Point and minister of planning, N’yongo argued that neither civil society nor government can expect to command the APRM stage without the other. “In as much as possible we would like civil society in all African countries to bloom like flowers and express themselves fully to the APRM. The reality is that this is not going to happen.”

If N’yongo’s view prevails, some governments will inevitably attempt to take a more controlling approach to peer review.

Three overall lessons are clear from civil society engagement with APRM. First, civil society has a tendency to sit back and wait for government to announce the governing council members and timeline for the process. This is an important mistake because once the plan has been announced governments can be very reluctant to change it, if for no other reason than the desire to avoid the embarrassment of admitting a mistake. By waiting for government, civil society also misses a crucial opportunity to influence government’s formative thoughts on APRM. Putting ideas and demands into the public domain can signal that civil society is serious about APRM and that if government opts for a controlled approach, it will face months or years of public criticism as a result.

Second, exploiting the opportunity offered by APRM requires pressure in many forms with many people over a long period of time. One overture or public statement won’t work. Civil society must build flexible coalitions and alliances to bring pressure and persuasion from multiple directions and institutions.

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<sup>1</sup> “APRM Best Practices and Lessons Learned: Exploring the Process and National Experiences”, seminar for APRM Focal Points by United Nations Economic Commission for Africa, the South African Institute of International Affairs and the APRM Secretariat, 20-21 February 2007, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

Third, the process has been reasonably robust and the country review teams have been conscientious. Civil society thus should do its best to influence the country self-assessment and programme of action, but influencing the country review team is also very important.

Civil society will have to defend its interests and convince governments so inclined that efforts to dominate APRM will result in complaint, protest, embarrassment and, potentially, as occurred in South Africa, a substantially critical review report.

While contestation is inevitable when various parties hold opposing views, civil society should consider what tone and approach should guide efforts to persuade government.

Even under the Ghana model, which turned the entire process of drafting the country self-assessment over to an exclusively civil society panel, government had to become involved when the process began developing a programme of action.

To make the most out of APRM, civil society must plan ahead – to overcome challenges and exploit opportunities. It is important to note that APRM is a multi-dimensional process involving many organisations and individuals – government, the national governing council, research institutions, and many civil society constituencies. Each has separate priorities and approaches. Achieving the best outcome requires that civil society think not only about what the APRM report should say but how to influence these various participants and the decisions that must be taken at key stages of the process.

Civil society will find that the sheer number of meetings and potential targets of influence will strain time and resources. Therefore it is vital to set priorities and build alliances. No one group can do it all. And if APRM is to result in long-term change to the systems of governance, civil society must see it not as an opportunity to score political points but to broaden consensus behind various reform proposals. It must particularly bring government and political parties around to its way of thinking. Ultimately, neither the national APRM process nor continental authorities can force governments into decisions with which they are uncomfortable.

## ***APRM Basics – Structures and Stages***

The peer review process defines institutions at the continental and national level.

### **Continental Institutions**

The Committee of Participating Heads of State and Government is known as the **APR Heads of State Forum** or APR Forum. It comprises of the presidents or prime ministers of the 26 countries that have acceded to the APRM. It meets about twice a year, often on the margins of AU Summits, and it is this group of peers that reviews fellow leaders. It is the APRM's highest decision-making body.

The **APR Panel of Eminent Persons** (APR Panel) currently consists of seven Africans of high standing and integrity appointed by the APR Forum to oversee the review process in individual countries, ensure the integrity of the process, consider review reports and make recommendations to the Forum. The Panel is currently chaired by Dr Dorothy Njeuma (from Cameroon) and its other members are Professor Adebayo Adedeji (Nigeria), Mr Mohammed Babes (Algeria), Ambassador Bethuel Kiplagat (Kenya), Dr Graça Machel (Mozambique), Dr Marie-Angelique Savané (Senegal) and Dr Chris Stals (South Africa).

The **APR Secretariat** is based in Midrand, South Africa and provides secretarial, technical, coordinating and administrative support services for the African Peer Review Mechanism. The secretariat is funded by voluntary contributions from countries that have acceded and by development partners.

The APRM has three **Technical Partners** that provide support services, advice and assistance. They are the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the African Development Bank (ADB). Country support and country review missions frequently use experts from these institutions.

A **Country Review Team** is the group of African experts who conduct the country review mission under the supervision of one member of the Panel of Eminent Persons. The review team draws from the technical partners, eminent academics, business leaders, the APRM secretariat and independent consultants. It visits an APR country for two to three weeks, to assess the integrity of the national process and conduct research to develop the final country review report.

The **Country Review Report** provides an assessment of best practices and governance gaps in the country under review. It makes reference to the self-assessment conclusions but goes beyond them as team members feel necessary. Countries under review are allowed to comment on the report and their comments form an appendix to the final report, but they are not allowed to edit the text.

The **Self-Assessment Questionnaire** provides the basic structure for the peer review analysis. It is divided into four thematic areas and offers guidance on the kinds of factors to be considered in conducting a governance analysis. It includes 25 objectives, 58 questions and 183 indicators as well as questions inquiring about the ratification and implementation of the various APRM standards.

## National Institutions

The APRM Guidelines stipulate that each participating country must have an **APR Focal Point** in government, to act as a liaison between the continental secretariat and the national APR structures. This focal point is usually a minister, diplomat or senior civil servant.

The country must also create a **National Governing Council** or **National Commission**. The council is responsible for managing an inclusive national process to produce two key documents: a **country self-assessment report** and **programme of action**. The Eminent Persons have advised that this council should include government, business and civil society members, and crucially have a non-government majority and a civil society or private sector leader. Most countries have chosen to make this body representative of different national constituencies (including women, youth, labour unions, people with disabilities, business organizations, among others).

Most countries have also established a small local **APRM Secretariat** to assist with administrative and logistical tasks.

Countries have also contracted academics or think-tanks as **research institutions** to compile the self-assessment report and programme of action as well as perform desk research, conduct surveys, manage workshops and locate specialist expertise needed to answer parts of the questionnaire.

## APRM Stages

The APR process follows five broad phases:

**Stage 1 – Preparation and self-assessment:** The country to be reviewed has initial consultations with the APR Secretariat, and later hosts a country support mission and signs a memorandum of understanding assenting to the review. The country appoints a national focal point and national governing council/national commission to oversee and drive the APR process, and develops its research and consultation programme. Simultaneously, the APR Secretariat writes a background paper on the country, as well as an issues paper highlighting key governance concerns. The stage ends when the country submits its country self-assessment report and programme of action – based on the APRM self-assessment questionnaire and the outcomes of research and consultation – to the Secretariat.

**Stage 2 – The country review visit:** Using the issues paper and the country's self-assessment as a basis, a team of 15-20 African experts led by a Panel member visits the country for two-to-three weeks to conduct the country review mission. The team assesses the integrity of the country process and conducts further research and interviews on key governance issues.

**Stage 3 – Preparation of the final country assessment:** Following the country review mission, the Panel and Secretariat compile a draft country review report based on the mission, the self-assessment, programme of action and background research. This report is sent back to the country for comment. The country may append its comments, but not amend the Panel's report.

**Stage 4 – The peer review:** The final review report is submitted to the APR Forum, and the head of state is "peer reviewed" by fellow heads of state.

**Stage 5 – Presentation to the public and African institutions:** Six months after the report is discussed by the Forum, it is publicly released, after being tabled at institutions such as the Pan-African Parliament and regional economic communities.



## ***Six Targets for Influence***

This booklet summarises the most important decisions of concern to civil society and offers strategies for constructively influencing the process, drawn from experiences in pioneer countries. In planning a strategy for influencing APRM, civil society should consider six main areas. A checklist of key questions follows each area:

1. **How the National Governing Council is Selected and Led:** Because the national governing council should be the key decision-making body for APRM, it is the first and perhaps most critical target of influence. The council can decide exactly how broad public consultations are, what methods are used, and how the country self-assessment report is written and edited. Thus civil society should seek to influence its membership and leadership. The extent of its independence from the Focal Point can be particularly important to the objectivity of the final country self-assessment and programme of action.
2. **How the Governing Council Makes Decisions:** Establishing clear rules for the council can make it more effective and avoid questions about fairness and transparency.
3. **How Research and Consultation are Conducted:** There are many options for conducting the technical and public aspects of APRM research, each of which has implications for the time, cost, thoroughness and credibility of the process. Once the governing council is in place, civil society should shift its attention to influencing its decisions about the research and consultation methods to be used. A more rigorous process will likely produce more sound analysis and stronger supporting evidence that is harder for opponents of reform to ignore.
4. **What the Self-Assessment and Programme of Action Say:** The process issues above are crucial, but civil society can have perhaps the greatest influence on content – what the country self-assessment and programme of action say about problems and solutions. To make a case for changes to the systems of governance, civil society must find compelling evidence of the need for change and organise it in a written submission. A lone voice making a suggestion – no matter how logical – is not as powerful as a variety of voices making the same point. Thus it is important that civil society groups seek out like-minded allies and urge them to make APRM submissions. Civil society also should reach out to parliament, business, the media, academia and other key institutions and urge them to express their views in writing and in public meetings.
5. **What the Country Review Team Concludes:** The country self-assessment is very important but it is not the last word. The final APRM report on a country is written by a team of 15-20 outside experts and supervised by the APRM Secretariat and Panel of Eminent Persons. They do not blindly accept the country self-assessment but conduct their own assessment based on a two-to-three week visit to the country. They read government and civil society inputs, conduct interviews and draw their own conclusions. Thus it is crucial that civil society seek opportunities to talk to the country review team and assist it by providing written evidence and pointers on areas that may have been left out of the country self-assessment or draft programme of action.
6. **How APRM is Institutionalised and Monitored:** APRM is not a once-off event but an ongoing process of evaluation, monitoring and reporting back. Countries are required to submit reports on the status of implementation of their promises every six months and the entire review is supposed to be repeated every three years.<sup>2</sup> APRM ought to be

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<sup>2</sup> This schedule was articulated in the APRM guidelines but looks increasingly improbable as of this writing. Accepted by the African Union in 2002 and established as a programme in 2003, the APRM system succeeded

established in a sustainable way so that its pledges are regularly monitored and are central to national budget and planning processes. However, in some countries the governing council, which had provided an avenue for civil society input, has been disbanded after the first review was completed. Civil society should seek to influence where APRM is lodged in government and how it is monitored. Civil society also should consider establishing its own APRM monitoring and tracking mechanisms.

### ***Overall Strategies for Influence***

To maximise influence through the APRM process, civil society should develop strategies in each of the six areas above. Each group or coalition of groups will have different capabilities and contacts that can be utilised. Some organisations may only wish to make input on a single issue, while others may want to affect the overall APRM process and all four areas of governance discussed in the questionnaire. In either case, developing an effective strategy for APRM requires anticipation of the challenges and opportunities. What follows is an APRM strategy guide for civil society, based on discussion with civil society activists in the APRM pioneer countries.

**Talk to All Who Will Listen:** APRM is a new process and all participants will be trying to make up their minds on the best way forward. Thus government officials may be open to influence. In many cases, they have not thought through the implications of their proposals and can be persuaded to make alternative arrangements. But remember that persuasion requires more than one conversation. You will have to persuade a variety of influential persons to change policy. Government does not have one mind and not all politicians or civil servants have the same views.

**Target Key Decision-Maker and Those Who Can Influence the Decision-Maker:** CSOs should seek direct meetings with the Focal Point and Governing Council, but should also persuade other individuals and institutions that may have influence on the Focal Point, including presidential advisors, ministries of communication, the foreign ministry, retired heads of state and influential persons. Communicating with many people takes time, so CSOs must prioritise and they must tailor their message to each unique audience.

**Don't Forget Parliament:** While decisions about APRM are made by the executive branch, parliaments often feel marginalised – even when they are dominated by the president's party. They have an institutional interest in governance and parliament itself features prominently in the APRM questionnaire. However, the Eminent Persons and continental APRM Secretariat meet with only a few select individuals in government. As a result, parliament may well appreciate information on how the process is supposed to work, ideas about how other country's parliaments have gotten involved or proposals to host public hearings. And parliament can be an influential ally in convincing the executive to open the process up or in ensuring adequate funds are allocated.

**Apply Persuasion Privately and Publicly:** It is important to attempt to persuade but also consider what to do if your target does not adopt your view. He or she may not be quite

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in completing reviews for only three countries by the end of 2006 – Ghana, Kenya and Rwanda. South Africa intended to undergo review in January 2007 but its review was delayed. Algeria, Nigeria and Mauritius have all made significant progress with Algeria and South Africa tentatively scheduled for review in June 2007. Thus the pace of reviews would have to accelerate very dramatically to reach the goal of a reviewing each country every three years.

persuaded by your reasoning but can be swayed by the extent to which your views seem to reflect a broader public opinion. Thus it is important to encourage many civil society actors to speak out through personal meetings, letters, radio call-in shows, newspaper editorials and interviews with news reporters. The media can be a particularly effective means of pressing for changes to the process or report. Using the media in conjunction with a variety of other forms of influence will reinforce your message and signal to government that civil society is informed of the rules, will not accept simplistic answers and is determined to follow through with APRM until the end. Once they conclude that civil society will not be quiet and go away, government is likely to take CSO proposals more seriously.

**Stay Informed, Network and Continue to Lobby:** Once the formal processes are in place for managing the APRM in your country, there will be a great many further decisions to be taken by the governing council. At times, civil society members of the council may find themselves outnumbered or at odds with other council members on questions of how the public will be consulted, how surveys will be managed and how the report and programme of action will be written and edited. Thus it is important that civil society members form an active network, stay in touch on the key developments and events and collectively continue to influence the process as it moves along.

**Attend All Public Consultation Meetings:** All countries so far have used a combination of public and expert consultations. Attending every event can be taxing but can be worth the effort. The more frequently the research institutes hear the same messages, the more likely those messages are to be incorporated into the country self-assessment.

**Put Your Views in Writing:** Focusing on process is important, but civil society also must find ways to influence the heart of the APRM – the analysis of problems and the formulation of solutions. Many countries have offered civil society the chance to speak in public meetings, but these have proven to be fairly ineffective at capturing substantive critiques of governance. Often dozens or hundreds of people attend, government officials may dominate the conversation and an individual may find she has only one brief moment to speak. More importantly, governments will, justifiably, be reluctant to change major policies based only on expressions of opinion. They will need solid evidence and compelling reasoning. Preparing a written list of issues and solutions can be influential at several levels.

1. For the research teams that are assigned to write the country self-assessment, answering all the parts of the APRM questionnaire can be very difficult. If they have a well-written document by authoritative groups within society, the job of identifying priorities and finding evidence can be much easier. If you are a specialist in a particular field, such as human rights, agriculture or gender – among many others – your views will have particular influence because they come from someone well informed and may well be cited in the final report as evidence that a given problem needs attention.
2. Most countries have left the programme of action until the end and have been under great time pressure to assemble solutions to the problems noted in the self-assessment. However, this time pressure can work to the advantage of civil society if it submits sound written recommendations.
3. The media will be looking for ways to determine whether the final self-assessment is considered to be a good reflection of civil society comments. Providing the media with copies of the inputs given by civil society can allow them to compare the submissions with the final product.
4. The country self-assessment is not the final word. After the country submits its self-assessment report, the Panel of Eminent Persons makes up its own mind about the

national issues. If CSOs take the time to write their views, they have something that can readily be submitted directly to the Eminent Persons, which allows them to judge public opinion directly. In South Africa's case, the self-assessment document written by the research agencies was heavily edited and many issues were removed or marginalised. However, civil society made a point of providing written documents directly to the Eminent Persons, who read them carefully and incorporated nearly all of the problems articulated by civil society in the final report. Thus civil society reports provided an important check on the government, which sought to minimise discussion of problems.

### ***Preparing a Written Submission***

Although the APRM questionnaire is a daunting 88 pages, civil society need not attempt to answer all four thematic areas (democracy and political governance; economic governance and management, corporate governance, and socio-economic development). At the simplest level, a written submission is an organised list of issues or problems, backed up by evidence and recommendations. That is the heart of APRM – identifying problems and finding solutions.

To assist civil society, SAIIA developed a simple process for preparing a written APRM submission:

1. **Identify Authoritative Reports on Governance:** First, identify the major written reports that may touch on subjects of concern to you. These may include reports from human rights organisations, from various arms of government, from the auditor-general, public protector, police, parliament or university research. Don't forget to include publications or reports by your own organisation or international bodies that have looked at your country. Reports from government sources can be particularly persuasive because it is government acknowledging or defining the problem in its own words. Useful government reports can include the finance minister's budget speech, central bank assessments of economic management, national development plans, long-term documents setting out the national vision, the text accompanying the national budget, parliamentary committee reports on investigations, and reports of special commissions dedicated to gender, human rights, corruption or local government.
2. **Extract Problems, Evidence and Recommendations from Each Report:** Read each report, highlight key paragraphs that either define problems or offer evidence of the extent or impact of the problem. Also highlight recommendations from such reports. Mark each highlighted page with a post-it note.
3. **Type and Footnote the Evidence:** Working through one report at a time, type in the key quotations and evidence. Use footnotes to include the exact document title and page number. Create a separate document with the choice parts of each report.
4. **Merge the Evidence into One Document:** When you have extracted the key parts of each report, begin merging the information into a consolidated issues list. Place all of the evidence pertaining to each issue under a separate heading, using bullet points to list evidence with numbers, surveys and direct quotations.
5. **Describe Each Problem:** Once all of the evidence is consolidated in one document, go back and write a short description of the problem under each heading. Note the contributing factors that cause the problem and recommendations for fixing the problem.

To make it easier at the end to find the recommendations, set each recommendation off in its own paragraph with a heading that says **Recommendation:** in bold.

6. **Organise by Grouping Related Issues in Sections:** Once you have written a description of each problem, which is now followed by bullet points of evidence, you must organise the material. Group related issues in sections or on separate pages so that, for example, all of the various human rights issues – affecting women, prisoners, foreigners, the media, opposition political parties – are next to each other. To help organise the report into sections, consider using the APRM's 25 objectives as headings, which will help the research teams or the Eminent Persons more easily incorporate your comments into the final country report.
7. **Prioritise:** Building an issues list from various reports may produce a great many problems, not all of which are top priority. After creating your issues list and organising it, print out a copy and write notes in the margins to designate problems that are major and minor. From these notes, prepare an executive summary listing the issues that you think are most important. Follow this summary with a list of your most important recommendations.
8. **Build Consensus Among Civil Society:** Once your issues list is complete, circulate it for comment and ask other influential organisations to add to it and comment on its wording. If possible, try to build a coalition of like-minded organisations that are prepared to sign their names to the report, which will give it added influence with government and the Eminent Persons.

### ***Influencing Through the Media***

In all of phases of the APRM process, the media can be an extremely valuable ally to civil society and a vehicle for influencing outcomes. Particularly in the early phases when government has not made up its mind on how to conduct the APRM, the media can be a useful way to spread information to civil society, to rally support for joint civil society initiatives and to signal to government that civil society is aware of the APRM rules and will insist on an open and transparent process. If government senses that civil society is poorly informed or disinterested, it may choose to cut costs by reducing the amount of public consultation and the openness of the process. And once the process begins, civil society organisations, individuals and the governing council can use the media to raise awareness and broaden the public conversation about governance. However, civil society should bear in mind some key opportunities and challenges.

**Opportunities:** Newspaper articles or broadcast talk shows represent useful ways to signal to government that civil society is serious about APRM, knows what the rules are and intends to play an active role. Sending that signal early, through a variety of media, can positively change the course of APRM in a country. Writing and sending opinion articles to the print media can also help inspire broader public debate about and awareness of peer review. And when the process is complete, the media can be used to raise awareness of the commitments to reform that were undertaken through the programme of action.

**Challenges:** While the media will likely be interested in the peer review, many newspapers, radio and television stations are thinly staffed and consequently may not have the time or experienced journalists needed to handle complex topics. Here are a few pointers can make the process more effective.

- **Understand the Media Emphasis on Events over Analysis:** It is important to understand that many media outlets are very focused on covering events and not well set up to analyse complex developments. In the early APRM countries, journalists have tended to cover the official launch, the announcement of the governing council, the first public consultation meeting, the hand-over of the country self-assessment, the arrival of the country support mission and country review mission, among other key events. However, these stories have often been very shallow, short and focused only on the occurrence of the event. If you want to get journalists to report on controversies in the formation and conduct of the APRM, you will have to have a programme of outreach to provide reporters and editors with information on what is at stake and who to speak to for comment. Given a choice between an article that is easy to write or one requiring lots of thinking and digging, reporters will naturally favour the simpler story. By offering assistance and pointers, you can help ensure that APRM gets better and deeper news attention.
- **Influence Editors:** In many media establishments, journalists are assigned to stories by their editor, who is the decision-maker about how to deploy reporters. Thus it is a useful strategy to phone key editors and ask to brief them on the process and provide them with insights about how the process is working and where the problems or opportunities lie.
- **Reach Out to Different Types of Editor:** Publications may have different editors for different sections. There will be an overall editor, who can be fairly detached from day-to-day news decisions but still someone worth speaking to because he or she sets the overall tone of the publication. In addition there can be an editor in charge of news as well as an editor in charge of the opinion section and of a feature or analytical section of the publication. Each of those editors will have particular spaces to fill and different interests, so stories need different angles to interest each of them. News editors can direct stories about particular events while opinion page editors look for outside writers from NGOs or academia to make contributions.
- **Seek Experienced Reporters:** While editors can be key decision-makers, it is helpful to identify and send information to the more senior reporters who cover politics and government.
- **Submit Opinion Articles:** While news stories may quote you on a subject, the opinion pages of newspapers offer a chance for you to put your own views forward in a coherent way that will get significant public attention. To get an opinion article printed, it generally should be 600-800 words in length but it is best to check with the editor about what word length he or she has to offer.
- **Use Opinion Articles Early in the Process:** While some governments may be open to active civil society leadership in APRM, others may be tempted to control the process and limit criticism. However, if civil society signals that it takes APRM seriously, that it knows the rules and intends to engage, government can be persuaded to conduct a more open, consultative process. This happened in Ghana, Kenya and South Africa. The best time to influence the process is before the national structures and processes have been announced, while government is still making up its mind.

## ***Influencing the Country Review***

All of the ideas above are aimed at influencing the country self-assessment report and programme of action. But these are not the last word. They are only the building blocks that the Panel of Eminent Persons, the continental APRM Secretariat and the country review team use to write the final country report. Even if you fail to get certain issues into the self-assessment report or programme of action, there is still opportunity to influence the final report on your country.

### **The APRM Secretariat and Panel of Eminent Persons**

The continental APRM Secretariat plays a crucial coordinating and research role and thus should not be ignored by civil society. The Eminent Persons assign one of their members to lead each country review and that person plays a very influential role in assessing issues and solutions in your country. Ultimately, the whole Panel of Eminent Persons will debate your country's report and the recommendations. If they are aware of neglected issues, they can and do insist on changes to the report or revisions to the programme of action. Providing information to both the panel and secretariat thus can be valuable.

**Influence the Background Report and Issues Paper:** The APRM Secretariat is responsible for preparing a background report and an issues paper that together are to guide the country review mission, which is a two-to-three week visit by a team of 15-20 governance experts. Getting issues into the background report and issues paper is a crucial step to alerting the review team about key priorities in your country. Because the Secretariat is small and has to do research on many countries, it may be limited in how much time it can dedicate to background research, and it may not have access to some of the key documents that are available in your country. Therefore, four key strategies can help:

1. **Send in Written Submissions:** When you complete your written issues list and programme of action, don't only submit it to the national process. Also send it along to the Secretariat.
2. **Send Key Reports:** Even if you don't have time to write your own issues report, you can make a big difference by sending copies of key national governance reports to the Secretariat and the Eminent Person who will lead your country's review. Because they work from far away, they may not be able find or even know about many documents. Purchasing the documents and mailing them may cost a bit of money, but it can be a very beneficial investment in the cause of good governance. These documents could include:
  - auditor-general's reports;
  - national budget speeches outlining problems;
  - human rights reports;
  - corruption assessments;
  - poverty assessments including the national Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper;
  - reports by significant NGOs or research institutes;
  - national vision or planning reports;
  - parliamentary reports and investigations; and
  - newspaper articles.
3. **Send in Lists of Experts:** Although the Eminent Persons have the right to speak to anyone in your country, in practice the organisation of the country review visit has been

left to the government in the early APRM countries. And because of time pressures and limited research staff, the Secretariat may not know who the best people are to speak to about certain key issues in your country. As a result, it can be very beneficial to prepare a list of contact details for key experts and civil society groups and forward this list to the Eminent Persons and Secretariat. It can help them do their jobs better and make it easier for them to get candid views.

4. **Send a Critique of the APRM Process in Your Country:** APRM is about learning from the past and sharing experience, but the APRM Secretariat won't be as familiar with the details of your national process as you will be. If there are problems, it can help the broader cause of APRM to send your comments on the process to the continental authorities. If your issues, recommendations or complaints are not documented they cannot be acted upon in future country reviews.
5. **Send a Critique of the Programme of Action:** In the early APRM countries, the programme of action was left until the very end of the process and was often prepared in a rush, which means the initial draft programme of action may not include some needed solutions or it may be unrealistic in some facets. It is important to remember that the programme of action outlines the steps your country is actually committed to implementing. The assessment report is useful to outline problems but the programme of action is how progress will be achieved. If you see inadequacies or would like to see certain laws or policy changes included in the programme of action, it can be helpful to point these out to the Eminent Persons. They ultimately make recommendations and tell the country whether its programme of action is acceptable or not.

### **The Country Review Team and Visit**

The country self-assessment consumes a great deal of time and in early countries, some civil society members have thought that once it is done, the APRM is effectively over for civil society. But there are still several crucial opportunities to influence the process and get civil society concerns reflected in the final report. A country review is based on three main inputs:

1. background research by the APRM Secretariat;
2. the country's self-assessment and draft programme of action; and
3. the information gathered by the country review team during a two-to-three week visit.

If civil society prepares for the country review team, it can still make a big impact, even if key problems and recommendations have not made it into the country self-assessment. A number of factors combine to make the country review visit an opportunity for civil society. Generally, the country review team members are senior academics, development officials, economists or business people. They have so far been very independent minded and striven to produce fair and credible reports. However, the APRM Secretariat has an enormous workload in preparing background research on 26 countries. On early review missions, the Secretariat only provided its background research to the review teams once they arrived for their visits. This is a shortcoming of the system but an opportunity for civil society to make sure that the review team are aware of any issues left out of the self-assessment or programme of action. The review team examines the self-assessment, but is not bound by it.

It can be extremely useful for civil society organisations to gather copies of key national reports and pass them on to the review team. These can include the national development plans, corruption surveys, reports of the parliament and auditor-general, governance surveys,



reports of human rights or corruption commissions, news articles and written civil society submissions.

Civil society can also be influential at another level. In the first four countries, the review team effectively relied on the government to set the agenda for the country review and arrange meetings. Because background research was not distributed prior to the country visit, the team members had limited opportunity to determine who they should interview in-country. Thus it can be useful to provide the Eminent Persons, the Secretariat and the review team members with contact details for key constituency representatives, experts and NGOs knowledgeable about certain issues. These should include unions, academics, business, trade experts, banking and financial representatives, independent review boards, judges, parliamentarians, human rights groups, election observer organisations, corruption monitors and others.

Getting these lists of contacts and reports into the hands of the review team can require persistence and a bit of investigation. Country review visits have not always been publicised well in advance and it can be difficult for civil society to find out when the team arrives, who is on it and where they will visit. Providing information to the Secretariat is a valuable first step. Each country review is led by one member of the Panel of Eminent Persons. Finding out who and making email or telephone contact can be very valuable. Preferably it should be done at the earliest stages of APRM.

Because information sent by post or email may not get to all review team members, it is advisable to find out which members are working on which of the four thematic areas of APRM and provide them with paper copies of key documents. Given the length of some submissions, the review team may find it prohibitively expensive to receive material by email, which would have to be printed in expensive hotel business centres.

Making personal contact also is an advantage, because individual review team members will likely have myriad questions requiring follow-up and/or assistance in finding the right experts on specialised subjects. Offering to assist them with information can make sure that they access needed information in a timely way.

### ***How APRM is Institutionalised and Monitored***

After the country review report and programme of action are discussed at heads of state level, and their contents are made public, countries must implement the reforms outlined in the programme of action. Again, civil society organisations should seek to influence which organisations put the programme of action into practice, who monitors its implementation, and how. The APRM guidelines note that reviews should be conducted every three years and reports on progress toward implementation should be filed every six months. Is there a suitable system to independently monitor progress on the programme of action? Has authority for such monitoring and appropriate funding been provided to an appropriate institution? Does the national budget cater for APRM reforms?

This is a difficult process that pioneering countries are currently struggling with. While many governments already have or are developing monitoring and evaluation systems, many CSOs lack this capacity and expertise. But the same principles of building trust, and exercising transparency should be applied when reporting on progress or delays. Citizen surveys and report cards are being used by Ghana to gauge public perceptions of the success of APRM-inspired reforms. Parliamentary public accounts committees and the auditor-general should be involved in monitoring APRM. And CSOs should know the time commitments stipulated

in the programme of action, and raise questions when implementation begins to lag. The methods of influence outlined above can be used at this stage of the process as well.

### ***Seizing the Initiative, Raising Funds***

Finally, civil society should consider the advantages of being proactive. In several early countries, civil society was aware that government had acceded to peer review but took no action until government announced its plan for the process and the appointments to the governing council. Only after the process began, organisations attempted to raise funds to make civil society input. However, the process gathers pace quickly after the governing body has been formed.

If civil society wishes to influence how the governing council is created, how its membership is chosen and its level of independence from government, it must begin raising awareness of APRM and seeking influence early, through the media, personal contacts and conferences. Similarly, writing compelling written submissions take time and preparation. Hence the sooner civil society mobilises, the more impact it can have.

Funding can be useful, but a great deal can be accomplished for very little. In several APRM countries, civil society neglected to seize the initiative because it sought to first raise donor funds. In Kenya, many of the disputes in the governing council grew from the desire of some civil society representatives for government to fund an entirely separate civil society report. A strong submission can be created without spending funds, if organisations are willing to put in the time and effort without expecting personal payment. In South Africa, civic organisations produced more than 60 major written submissions without outside funding, and these reports ultimately dramatically changed the course of the national APRM, influencing both the national self-assessment and the final country report.

APRM is hard work but it has great potential to improve Africa's governance and thus its economic success. Countries – both governments and civil society – will get out of the process only as much as they put into it.

## ***What to Ask For – a Civil Society Checklist***

### **How the National Governing Council is Selected and Led:**

- Should the governing council follow an eminent person model, or be representative of all major constituencies?
- Should civil society elect their own representatives or should government select based on nominations?
- Does the governing council have a civil society majority and a civil society chair in keeping with the APRM guidelines?
- Does the focal point allow the council to make the decisions on research and writing of the report, as outlined in the guidelines, or does he/she attempt to control or lead the council?
- Do the selected civil society representatives have sufficient professional and managerial experience? Are they credible and widely accepted as non-partisan?
- Will the civil society representatives have sufficient free time to work full-time on APRM for an extended period?
- Should council members be paid and if so what is a fair amount and system?
- Is the proposed council too large for efficient decision-making?
- Should government representatives be non-voting members as in Kenya?
- If the council is divided into committees, does civil society retain a majority on the committees?
- Can sub-committees take decisions on important matters or research, editing and writing without consulting the wider council membership?

### **How the National Governing Council Operates:**

#### **Independence**

- Who should choose the support staff and how? If not independently selected by the council, how can government employees avoid compromising the independence of the report?
- Are the support staff/secretariat physically located outside of government, to be chosen by the governing council and drawn from business and civil society rather than from government staff, which will retain loyalty to government over the APRM process?
- Who chairs the council?
- Where should council offices be located – inside government or in independent premises?
- To what extent can the council take spending decisions without seeking government approval for specific forms of research or consultation?
- If civil society members have full-time jobs and cannot attend all meetings, how are decisions taken? Can they nominate alternates?

#### **Transparency and Council Operations**

- Should council meetings be public? Should they be open to the media?
- Are governing council meetings, decisions and debates properly recorded and the minutes publicly available?
- How should decisions be taken if all members cannot attend a meeting?
- Is it permissible for an executive committee to take decisions without consulting the wider membership?
- Has the council formally discussed research methods and committed the research and consultation to paper?
- Has the research and consultation plan and the associated budget been circulated for comment before finalisation?
- Does the council have a website for making public all public inputs, survey results and draft thematic reports?

#### **Budgeting**

- Does the council require legal status to approve spending?
- How should council decisions relate to national tendering and procurement laws?
- APRM requires widespread consultation and extensive research but these things involve significant costs. Failure to allocate sufficient funds can result in inadequate consultation. Are

the funds adequate to conduct all of the forms of research and consultation required by APRM?

- Is there any provision for funds to assist civil society organisations in drafting their own APRM submissions?

## **How Research and Consultation are Conducted:**

### **Research Mix**

- What mix of technical research, desk research, surveys and public consultation methods research methods should be used?
- Does the research plan reach all regions, ethnic groups and ages effectively?
- Does the research plan identify the particular experts, interest groups and government officials needed to deal with the 25 main issue clusters in the questionnaire?
- Does the research plan incorporate a well-planned public opinion survey based on a representative sample that reaches all regions, ages and ethnic groups?
- Does the research plan have time, staff and resources to answer the many technical questions in APRM concerning the constitution, balance of powers, trade policy, monetary policy, budgetary procedures, human rights, social development indicators and local/provincial government administration, among other subjects?
- Does the research plan make provision for use of at least four independent think tanks to summarise public inputs and ensure that the APRM questionnaire is properly answered without political interference?
- Are the criteria for selection of research institutes clear and appropriate, given the demands of the questionnaire?
- Are the research institutes allowed to subcontract if necessary to obtain specialised expertise?

### **Writing and Editing**

- Research institutes are typically responsible for drafting the country self-assessment and programme of action but precisely how are final revisions done?
- If the council revises the draft, precisely how is the text edited and who approves? Does government edit and the council accept or the council edit and government members comment on the edits?
- Does the final report include specific comments, quotes and points of view when there are divergent views on certain aspects of governance or does it attempt to assert one consensus voice that removes dissenting voices?
- Are the sources of data and opinion clearly footnoted?

### **Validation**

- Does the research plan make provision of time and funds to circulate the draft country self-assessment for comment?
- Does the research plan include separate seminars of adequate length to validate the draft report and programme of action, which may run to hundreds of pages?

### **Programme of Action**

- Does the research and consultation plan include stages with adequate time allowed for development of a comprehensive programme of action?
- Is the programme of action realistically costed?
- Is responsibility clearly assigned?
- Some countries argue that when government already has a reform effort addressing a given subject it should not be included in the programme of action, but how should it be handled when the testimony and/or evidence suggests that the existing reform programmes are not working?

### **Adequate Time**

- Most countries have taken more than a year to complete a national self-assessment from the appointment of research institutes. Time restrictions can directly compromise the quality of analysis, the extent of consultation and the consequent quality of the programme of action. Does the envisioned timeframe allow adequate time for civil society, business and other interested parties to make written submissions?

- Are consultation meetings advertised well in advance to give citizens a fair chance to participate?
- Are all public submissions, the country self-assessment and programme of action made public in a timely way?
- Are participants in validation meetings afforded access to the self-assessment draft and the proposed programme of action with sufficient time to allow meaningful comment on their contents?
- Does the research and validation plan allow adequate time for senior government officials, research agencies and civil society to debate draft reports and recommendations to reach consensus? This would require at a minimum two to three days dedicated to each of APRM's four thematic areas.

### **What the Self-Assessment and Programme of Action say:**

#### **The Country Self-Assessment Report**

- Does the report answer all of the APRM questions?
- Does it include all of the major issues and causes of problems?
- Does it reflect the differing views presented in public submissions, including by government?
- Is it fair, comprehensive and technically competent?
- Is the text candid in discussing problems?
- Are there major national problems that are not addressed or are given inadequate explanation?
- Is the assessment based on fair and broad consultation and rigorous technical research?
- Does the final text reflect the version publicly validated by citizens?

#### **Programme of Action**

- Do the solutions proposed in the programme of action offer a realistic potential to fully address the problems in the self-assessment?
- Are the actions or methods used to solve problems clearly explained?
- Is the programme of action realistically costed?
- Is responsibility clearly assigned?
- Some problems are very large in scale or socially complex and solutions are not yet apparent. Does the programme of action acknowledge these problems and make provision for additional research and policy experimentation?

### **What the Country Review Team Concludes:**

- Are there key issues that have been left out of the country self-assessment report or programme of action that the review team should be made aware of? Prepare a clear written analysis pointing out key points left out of the self-assessment phase.
- Are there key documents supporting these missing areas that would help the review team understand and assess the missing issues? Provide the review team with copies of citizen submissions, news articles and key reports reflecting on national priorities.
- To ensure that the country review team is aware of key experts, can you prepare a list of contact details for organisations and experts who would add valuable perspective to the country review team deliberations?
- Can you find out and widely share information on who is on the country review team, when they arrive, what hotels they will use and when and where they will hold public consultations? Ask the governing council, the APRM Secretariat and the Eminent Person in charge.

### **How APRM is Institutionalised and Monitored:**

- The APRM guidelines note that reviews should be conducted every three years and progress toward implementation should be filed every six months. Is there a suitable system to independently monitor progress on the programme of action?
- Has authority for such monitoring and appropriate funding been provided to an appropriate institution?
- Has parliament been involved in monitoring APRM through the public accounts committee or the auditor general?
- Has budgetary provision been made to enable effective implementation of programme of action items?

The African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) is a unique process through which African governments and civil society groups collaborate to improve the quality of governance, economic development and political freedom. By opening a national conversation about governance, APRM offers tremendous opportunities for civil society to raise neglected issues and help improve the systems of government and democracy.

APRM is about identifying problems with the systems of governance and finding solutions. But the process itself can be complex. Each country must form national institutions that involve civil society, select research institutions, conduct various types of research, produce a country self-assessment report and programme of action. Then a team of outside experts will visit and make its own assessment.

To realise the benefits of APRM, civil society must think in terms of influencing each stage of the process, using networking, persuasion, participation as well as the media and public pressure. Civil society should develop strategies to influence at many levels government, parliament, non-government organisations, business, national institutions involved in managing APRM and the continental authorities responsible for overseeing the process.

This guide provides practical strategies to help civil society influence each of those important audiences and reminders of the key factors and lessons learnt in the early APRM countries.

For further information, assistance in training, and research material please contact:

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